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A CLEVER WORK OF ART "THE VIOLETS"

BY LARCHE

(See page 128)

THE wiser and greater as a man an artist is, the more he admires restraint, not only in life but in art. And the greatest artists are the most self-controlled and their control works most at the height of their powers and careers. Before they mature they are often wild, and after they mature they frequently become careless as they become senile. Hence they do their childish work early in life and their defective work when past their meridian.

Young fellows hate all criticism, from any quarter. Later in life, when they become wiser, they learn that in art we must allow no friendships or brotherly love to control us in any degree in judging a work of art, because in that path they then see self-stultification and moral suicide. Then they no longer object to a classification of works of art into great, clever and otherwise, because then they are more keen to know the exact truth. Then they no longer boil over and say "great!" before a trivial sketch, when they mean it is only a cleverly suggested idea.

Larche's "The Violets" is a distinctly clever work of art, it is in a class by itself. It belongs to the transition period of one line of French sculpture between the "academic" and the "modernistic"; it is semi-academic and contains a hint of the revolt which was to come later.

It is merely clever because the conception is of no special importance, not greatly stirring or lifting or thought-compelling and, if badly done technically, would be absolutely trivial. What saves it, however, and lifts it into the high class of clever art—next to the great—is its exceedingly clever composition and craftsmanship.

It is one of the earliest successful examples of the so-called mingling of painting and sculpture

and which is the most distinctive new note—at any rate the only one worthy of respect—that French sculpture has given to the world and one that alone differentiates it from the Greek. This superimposing of painting on sculpture for the sake of color had never before been quite so successfully realized as in this work; the resultant "color" is really a most charming thing—when carried no farther than Larche carried it in this group. Unhappily it has been now carried so far that artists have slurred their forms to a degree that places their work within the class of degenerate art.

Note in this group that none of the forms are neglected or badly drawn or badly modelled or insufficiently carried out—when they are not covered by the wheat, leaves and foliage. When uncovered they are worked out as carefully as they would have been by any academic sculptor. Wherein it is not academic is this: the extent to which the human figure growing out of the plant-life and out of the earth is suggested. This was done two hundred years before, it is true, but never before quite so cleverly and charmingly. On the other hand the group expresses nothing of importance, no idea or sentiment of any greatly stirring kind—it illustrates no story. But it is of infinite smile-provoking charm in respect of color, line and form and it is exquisite in technical execution. And so it had also a deserved great success in the Paris Salon. There is in it a note of that refined, comic gaiety which is so distinctly French, which can only be felt and not analyzed, one they express by the words *épièglerie* and "chic," for which we have no exact equivalents in English. Not lofty enough in thought to enrapture us, it is full of delicate fancy and charm; an example of the quintessence of cleverness such as only modern Frenchmen can supply.

A DEGENERATE WORK OF ART "A WOMAN IN CONTORTION"

BY RODIN

(See page 130)

THOSE conversant with the history of modern art in France from 1850 down, know that about that date French art split into two distinct streams. The one is called "modern art" and the other "modernistic art." Modernistic art means modern art run to seed through a steady degeneration, from accentuation to exaggeration and from exaggeration to deformation of the form and to a repellant ugliness unknown in the history of art, an ugliness which hangs heavy and weighs upon our civilization like the cold, clammy hand of some cosmic monster.

That this drift towards the ugly and "the deformation of the form" was ushered in principally by Rodin is not questioned, because he put it forth

as an æsthetic theory, according to one of his eulogizers, and his work bears out the words of his deluded admirers. We are not now going into any lengthy analysis of Rodin or even of this sample of his work. That may come later.

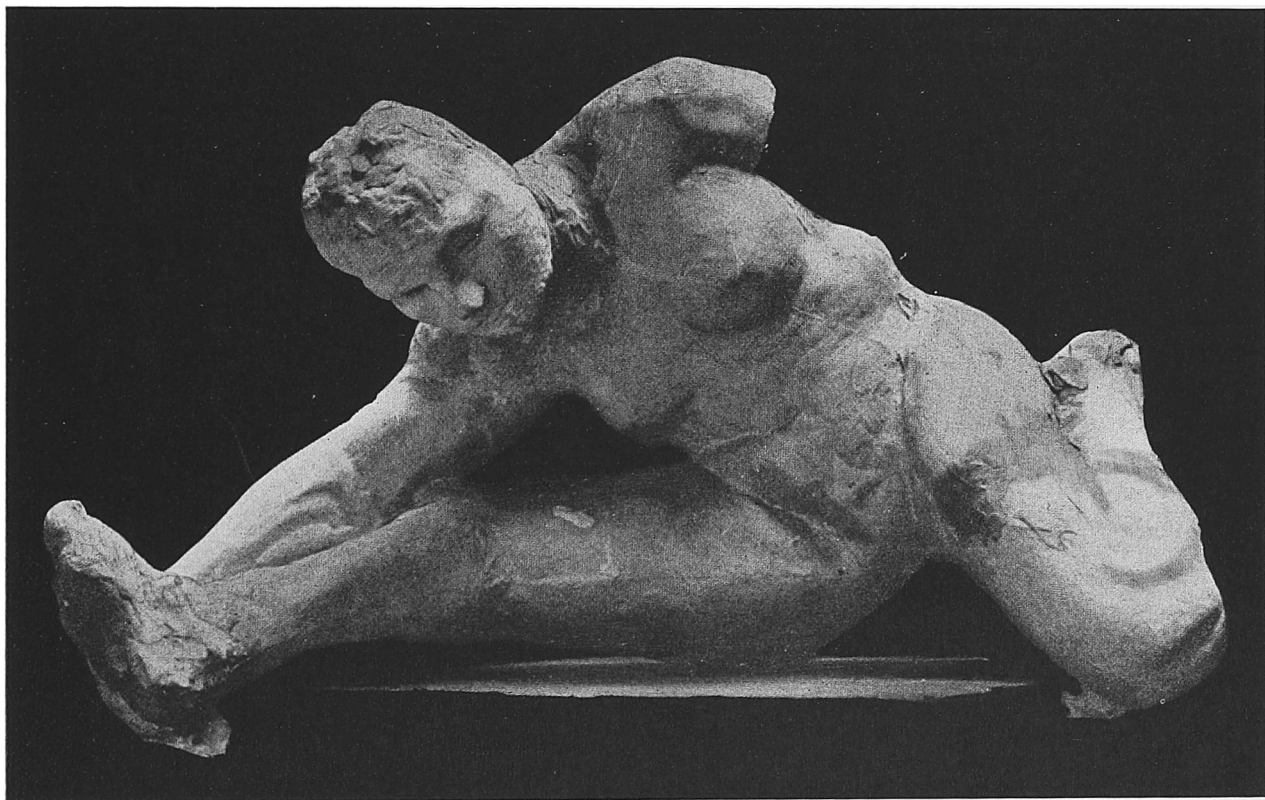
This work was exhibited in the National Salon at Paris about 1911, in the magnificent central hall of the *Grand Palais*, and on the spot, in the very center, usually reserved for Rodin. There were sycophants then who fawned upon him because he had become powerful in the politics of the French world of art through the support of his friends in the art department of the government that was in power at the time. Let us admit that his was but a crude, life-size sketch, utterly unfinished—the

head having been at one time knocked off, then stuck on crudely with plaster, not one inch being modeled or even half modeled. And yet this unformed mass, repulsive from the point of view of a finished work of art, was given the place of honor in the National Salon in the department of sculpture!

And how the hypnotized, deluded, rattle-brained *coryphées* of Rodin did genuflect before this daub in plaster! How they dilated on the wonderful "technique" of this patched-up monstrous mass of pudgy plaster, as though Rodin were a god, and as if even a lump of clay, dropped by him, had necessarily a divine radiance! It was simply sickening! It was degrading both to the aberrated sycophants and to Rodin himself who, by the mere exhibition of this brutal excrescence, either as a mere, rudimentary and patched-up mass of frag-

ments or as a finished work of art, was guilty of a piece of charlatanism.

The immediate result was that in the year following the exhibition of this monstrosity, the "modernistic" sculpture in the National Salon took a drop as regards rational composition and modeling, and the dropping has continued, until to-day we see things so unformed and shapeless, so brutal and grotesque that we can not tell whether they are square, round or pyramidal, whether they are fish, flesh or fowl. But we do know that many of them are insane. Had the exhibition of this shapeless lump of plaster been the only case of sinning on the part of Rodin, nothing would be said. But he sinned so often in this manner, and through this he did so much harm by repeated charlatanistic antics, that history will note it to his eternal disadvantage.



"A WOMAN IN CONTORTION"

By RODIN

(See page 129)

The public must remember that there are in Paris two great Salon exhibitions every spring—the regular, old Salon and "the rebel" or Salon National at which latter this creation of Rodin was

exhibited and that while the "modernistic" followers of Rodin applauded this work the normal artists and public deplored it profoundly and howled it down, even with fierce execration!

